

USING EXPOSURE THERAPY WITH ANXIOUS YOUTH

WPPNT: 10-25-2012

Objectives

- Quick overview of the key concepts and principles underlying exposure therapy
- Preparation for conducting exposure therapy
- Conducting exposure therapy skillfully and effectively
- Applications to common fears of childhood and adolescence

Key Concepts and Principles

- Exposure
 - ▣ Presenting feared stimuli in a way that facilitates new (corrective) learning
- Response Prevention
 - ▣ Not allowing escape, avoidance, or other behavior that interferes with the new (corrective) learning
- Extinction
 - ▣ The elimination of a conditioned fear response through repeated exposure to the phobic stimuli in the absence of 1) actual harm and 2) the reinforcement of escape



“In short, corrective learning occurs when exposure is (1) fear provoking but (2) lacks the feared consequences.”

-Chorpita (2007)

Key Concepts and Principles

□ In Vivo

- ▣ Direct confrontation with the actual feared object or situation
- ▣ Preferred when it is possible

□ Imaginal (or in vitro)

- ▣ Utilizing imagery to mentally construct and engage in a scene that triggers the fear
- ▣ Examples: vomiting, getting lost in a crowd

Key Concepts and Principles

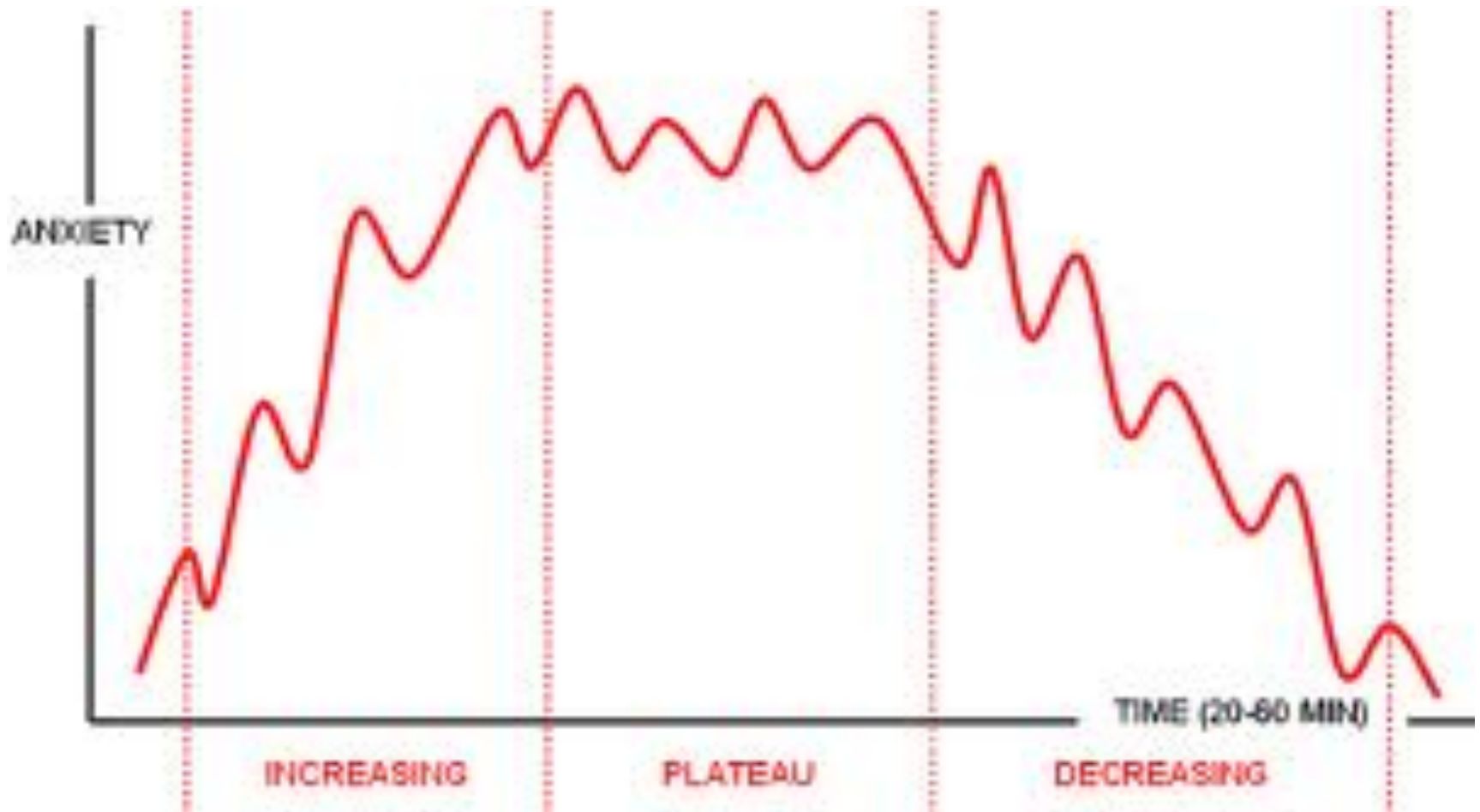
□ Sensitization

- ▣ The progressive amplification of a response as a result of repeated presentations of a stimulus
- ▣ The negative outcome of unsuccessful exposure tasks

□ Desensitization / habituation

- ▣ The gradual decrease of a response as a result of repeated presentations of a stimulus
- ▣ The positive outcome of successful exposure tasks

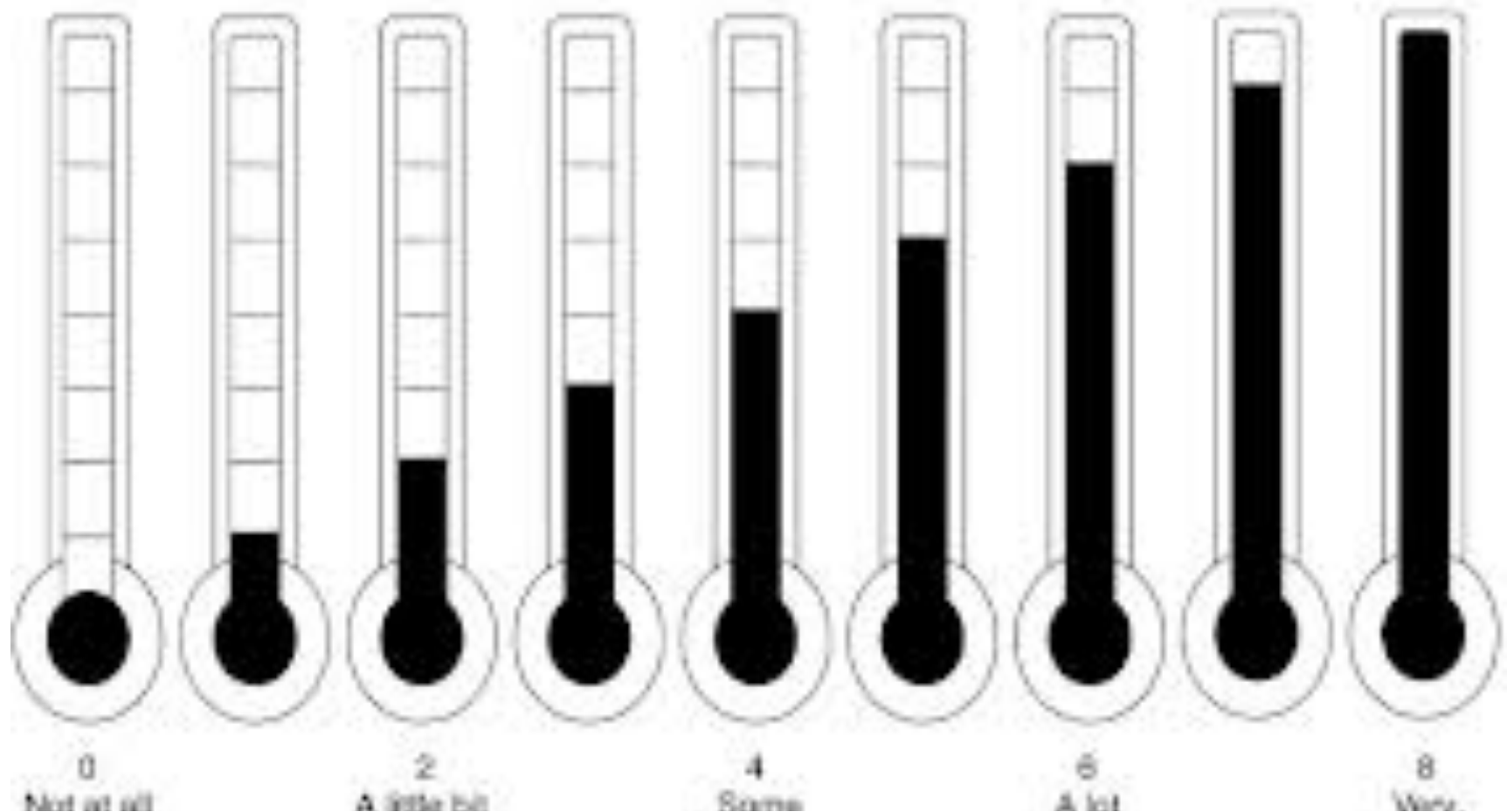
The Habituation Curve



Preparation for Exposure

- Establish trust and rapport
- Provide a rationale and expectations for exposure
 - ▣ Assure safety and control
 - ▣ Use child-friendly analogies of habituation
- Training in use of a rating scale
- Development of a fear ladder
- Training in simple coping strategies (as needed)
- Development of a positive reinforcement system (as needed)

Fear Thermometer



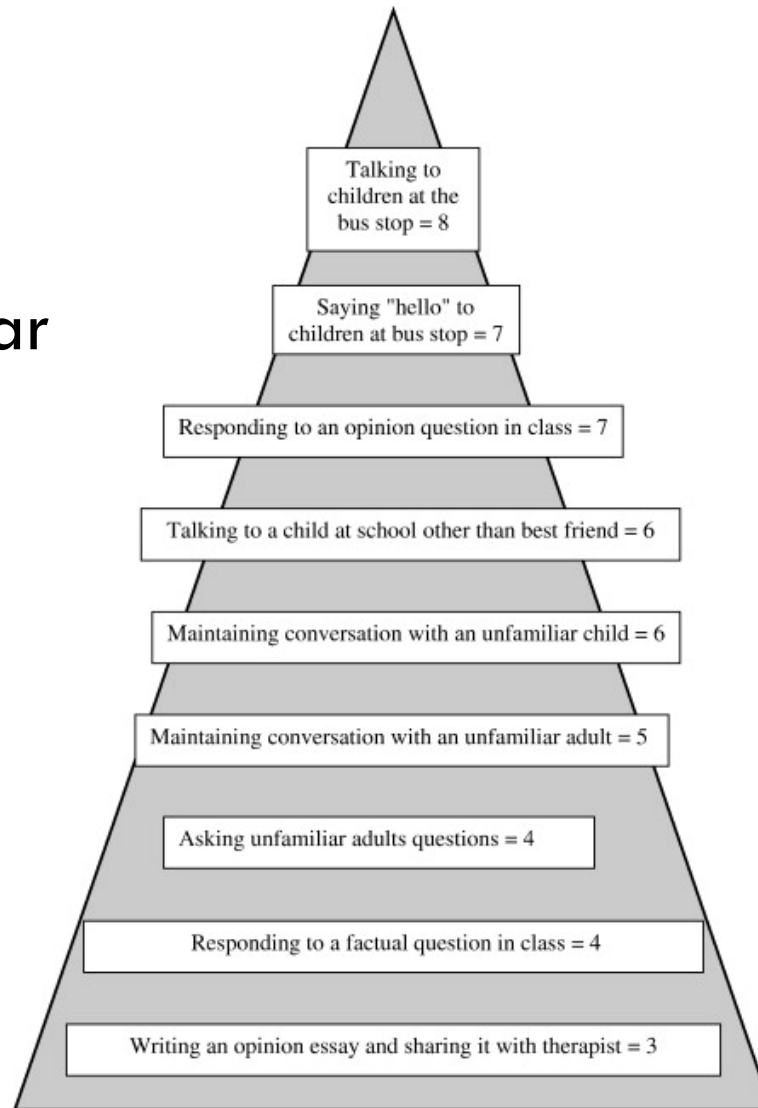
Fear Thermometer Training

- Explain that each emotion can be experienced at different levels of intensity (elicit/give examples)
- Explain that this is our best way to measure the intensity of the child's emotion
- Identify event associated with maximum fear
- Practice making ratings in the present and for recently occurring situations
- Practice predicting ratings for hypothetical situations

Development of Fear Ladder

- Brainstorm a list of situations / tasks / objects relevant to the child's fear
- Do not be constrained by normalcy
- Be somewhat constrained by controllability
- Have child make ratings for the peak fear they would expect to experience in that situation
- Rank situations according to expected fear level (place them on steps in the fear ladder)

Example fear ladder: 11 year old with social phobia



Conducting Exposure Skillfully

- Be calm and neutral
- Avoid reassurance and distraction
- Encourage complete engagement in phobic situation
- Obtain fear thermometer ratings regularly
(every minute is typical)
- Do not end exposure until rating decreases by 50%,
ideally until rating is 2 or less
- Consider longer sessions if necessary

Conducting Exposure Skillfully

- Assign at-home exposure exercises
- Provide explicit directions to family members and invitation to call to troubleshoot
- Repeat the same exposure task until the initial and peak anxiety levels are both insignificant

Needle Fears (Specific Phobia)



- Look at drawing of hypodermic needle
- Look at photo of hypodermic needle
- Look at real needle
- Sit with needle, capped, against arm
- Watch blood draw video
- Get finger prick
- Get immunization

Germ Fears (OCD)

- Touch dirty laundry with a clean tissue
- Touch dirty laundry with a single bare finger
- Place one hand on top of pile of dirty laundry
- Place two hands on top of pile of dirty laundry
- Insert arms to elbows into pile of dirty laundry
- Insert arms to shoulders into pile of dirty laundry
- Lay entire body on pile of dirty laundry
- Cover entire body with pile of dirty laundry

Intolerance of Change/Uncertainty

- Using a different entrance to the school building
- Taking a different / confusing route to school
- Not knowing who is going to pick up from school
- Knowing that parent is going to be late picking up from afterschool but not how late
- Knowing that parent is going to be late picking up from afterschool one day but not knowing which day



Separation Fears

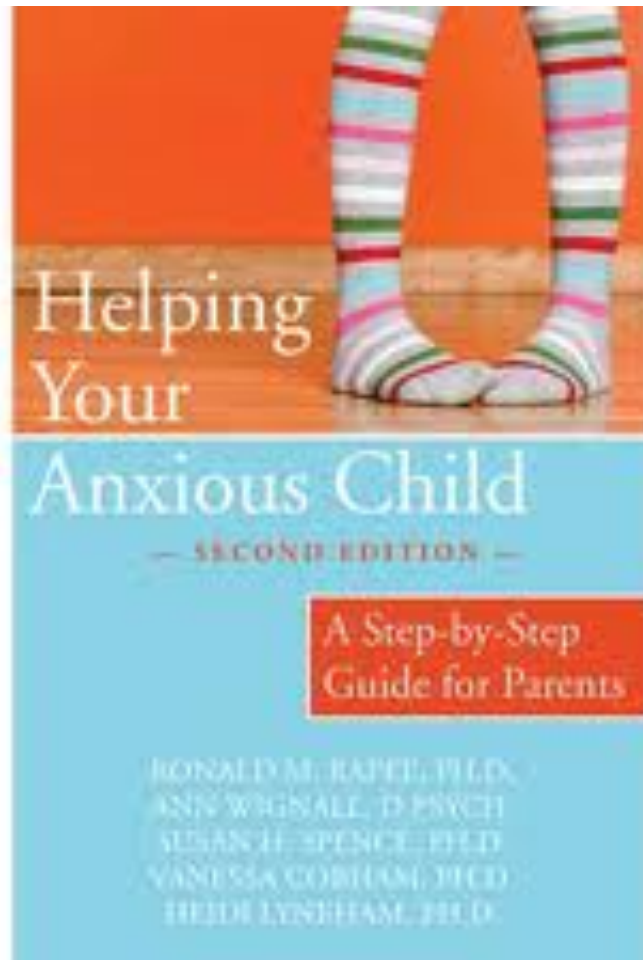
- Alone in a room with parent in next room
- Alone upstairs with parent on main floor
- Alone in basement with parent upstairs
- Alone in bedroom with parents in next room
- Alone in bedroom with parents downstairs
- Repeat each of the steps above at night

Selective Mutism



- Talking to parent in therapist's office while therapist is outside
- Talking to parent in therapist's office while therapist is working at desk
- Leaving a voicemail for the therapist
- Playing a recorded message for the therapist
- Reading aloud in front of the therapist
- Answering yes-and-no questions from the therapist

For Parents

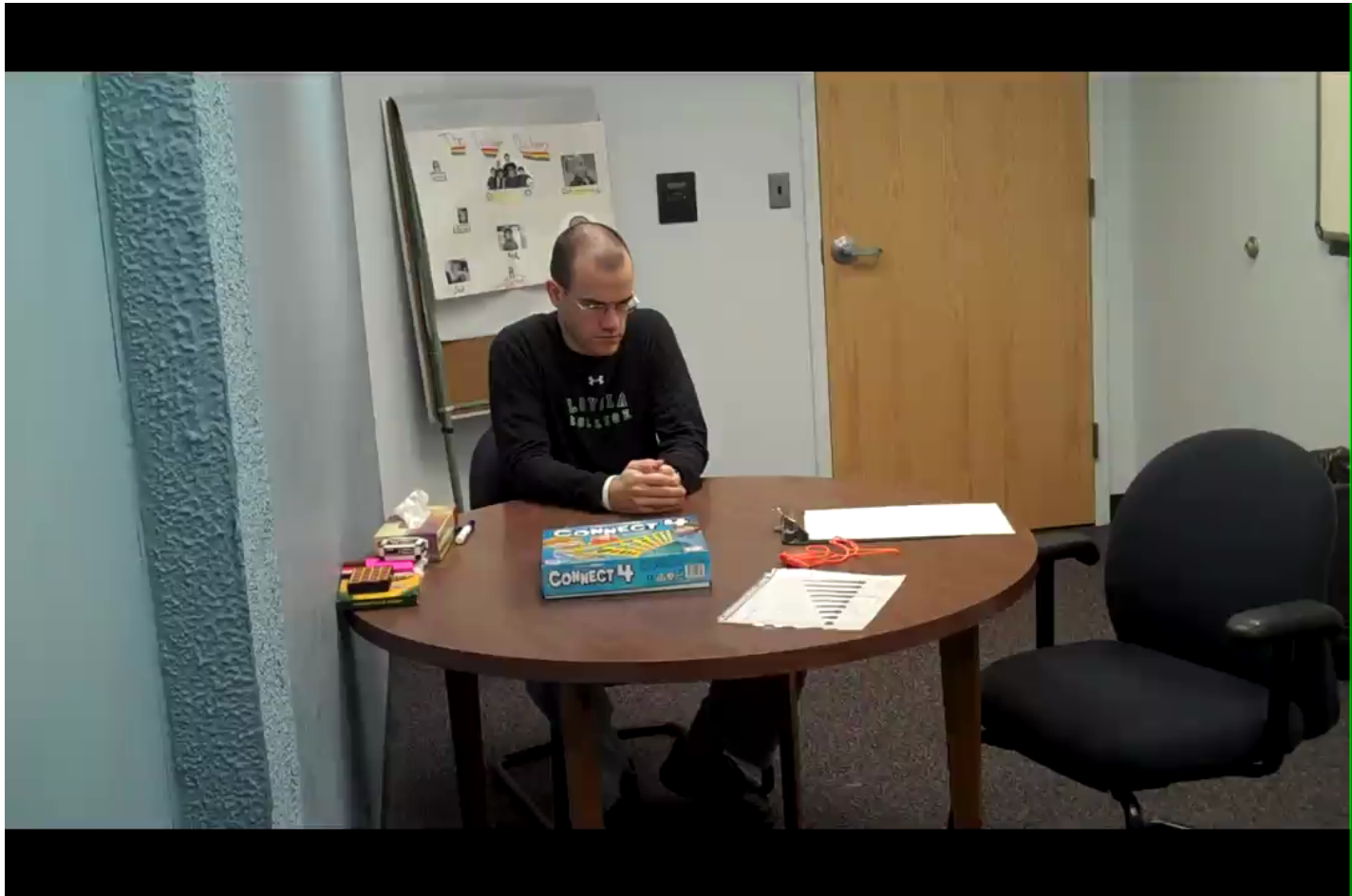


For Children



Video: Exposure Prep (Beidel et al.)

www.journals.elsevier.com/cognitive-and-behavioral-practice/
Volume 17 (2010) 142-153



Video: Exposure Task (Beidel et al.)

www.journals.elsevier.com/cognitive-and-behavioral-practice/
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Concerns?

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